

Message Text

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ACTION SCS-03

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SCA-01 PRS-01 SSO-00 L-02 H-02

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P 121215Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIOTIY 8032

INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: CASC

SUBJECT: WASHINGTON AREA CHARTER GROUP STRANDED

1. DEPARTMENT MAY RECEIVE INQUIRIES ABOUT WELFARE OF GENERAL TOURS GROUP OF ABOUT 162 PERSONS, MOSTLY FROM WASHINGTON AREA, WHOSE AEROFLOT CHARTER FLIGHT TO LENINGRAD WAS DIVERTED TO MOSCOW'S SHEREMETEVO AIRPORT LATE AFTERNOON MARCH 11 BECAUSE OF LENINGRAD WEATHER CONDITIONS. AEROFLOT HOPED TO PROCEED TO LENINGRAD AFTER SHORT DELAY, BUT WAS UNABLE TO DO SO UNTIL ABOUT 10 A.M. MARCH 12 AND GROUP SPENT UNCOMFORTABLE NIGHT IN SHEREMETEVO AIRPORT AND TRANSIT FACILITIES. INTOURIST FOUND BEDS FOR ABOUT 20 OF MORE ELDERLY IN AIRPORT TRANSIT HOSTEL, BUT MOST HAD TO SIT UP OR TRY TO SLEEP ON COUCHES IN LOUNGES OVERNIGHT.

2. EMBASSY DUTY OFFICER WENT TO SHEREMETEVO MIDDLE OF NIGHT TO PROVIDE MORAL SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE IN DEALING WITH AIRPORT STAFF. GROUP SPIRITS GENERALLY IMPROVED, BUT MANY MEMBERS INCAPABLE UNDERSTANDING WHY HOTEL ROOMS, ETC. WERE NOT IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE TO EMBASSY REPRESENTATIVE.

3. COMMENT: AS USUAL IN SUCH INSTANCES, MANY OF STRANDED TRAVELLERS WERE IRATE AND FRUSTRATED AS WELL AS UNCOMFORTABLE. AS DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, SHEREMETEVO TRANSIT FACILITIES HAVE GOOD RESTAURANT BY SOVIET STANDARDS AND SPACIOUS LOUNGE IN PRE-DEPARTURE AREA, BUT NO SLEEPING ACCOMODATIONS

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CONSIDERED ADEQUATE BY AMERICAN STANDARDS AND ONLY A VERY

SMALL TRANSIT HOSTEL, GENERALLY USED FOR TRANSIENTS WITHOUT VISAS AND PERSONS IN IMMIGRATION DETENTION. THERE IS CHRONIC SHORTAGE OF HOTEL ROOMS IN MOSCOW, AND EVEN IN MARCH INTOURIST WOULD HAVE DIFFICULTY PLACING 162 PERSONS SUDDENLY AND UNEXPECTEDLY. ALSO, GENERAL TOURS AND OTHER TRAVEL COMPANIES SELL SUCH GROUP TOURS FOR VERY LITTLE, REPORTEDLY \$500 TO \$600 PER PERSON, AND WITH SMALL PROFIT MARGIN GENERAL TOURS AND INTOURST CANNOT EASILY REARRANGE ITINERARIES UNEXPECTEDLY WITHOUT ADDING TO COSTS AND OBVIATING PROFITS.
STOESSEL

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